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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

THE
HISTORY of SAMSON. K



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THE HISTORY, &c.

THERE is not, perhaps, throughout the Bible a story that presents us with a more striking and useful moral than that of Samson; I shall relate it nearly in the words of the Scripture, making such observations as must naturally arise in the course of it.

In the 13th chapter of the Book of Judges, we read that "The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and that he delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years." At the end of that period the Lord sent his Angel to the wife of a certain man, named Manoah, of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, and he said unto her behold now thou art barren, but thou shalt conceive and bear a son, now therefore beware I pray thee and drink not wine, nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing, for lo! thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." The wife of Manoah in due time, according to the word of the Lord, bore the child promised, and called his name Samson; and the child grew and the Lord blessed him.

When Samson arrived at man's estate, he saw a young woman among the daughters of the Philistines

that pleased him, and he requested his father to a
 her for his wife. This was certainly contrary
 the law of Moses, but it appears, that the Lord per-
 mitted him to take a wife from among the Philistines
 that it might in the end give Samson a favourable
 opportunity to begin the deliverance he had pro-
 mised, for when Sampson's father and mother re-
 proves him for wishing to take a wife from among
 the uncircumcised, it is said, chap. xiii. ver.
 "but his father and mother knew not that it was
 the Lord, that he sought occasion against the Phi-
 listines."

Samson was endued with wonderful strength
 body: in his way to Timnah, a city of the Philistines
 where the parents of the young woman he was go-
 ing to seek in marriage, lived, he was attacked
 a young lion; "and the Spirit of the Lord came
 mightily upon him and he rent him (the lion) as
 would have done a kid; and he had nothing (me-
 ing nothing to defend himself) in his hand." When
 Samson arrived at Timnah, his father asked
 young woman of her parents, and Samson took
 her to wife, and, according to the custom of
 country, he made a feast on the occasion that lasted
 seven days; for though he was a Nazarite he
 not affect to be singular in a thing of that nature.

It is no part of religion to act contrary to the
 innocent customs of the places where we live;
 then we must be well assured that they *are* innocent.
 Samson to entertain his guests proposed a Riddle
 and laid a wager with them that they could
 find it out.

It seems to have been an ancient custom,
 friends were together on such occasions not to
 all the time in eating and drinking, but to pro-

ingenious questions, whereby their learning and ingenuity might be tried or improved; and how much more rational was this than the vile practice that often disgraces the present age, of putting about the glass till reason is overpowered, and we are sunk below the brute. Samson's wager was laid against the ingenuity of his guests, but, when after seven days they found they could not make out the Riddle, they were so mean and dishonourable as to resolve to obtain the solution by unfair means. When Satan once gets footing in our hearts there is no lengths of wickedness to which he will not carry us. No sooner had they taken this resolution, than they went to Samson's wife, and said unto her, "entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the Riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire; hast thou called us to take what we gave," meaning, had she invited them to the wedding feast for her husband to win from them the wager which he had laid. Samson's wife was so weak and so wicked, as to be wrought upon by their entreaties or threats, and she suffered her husband to have rest neither night nor day till he told her the meaning of his Riddle, which she immediately communicated to her countrymen, the men of the city (for it appears by this time it was become a matter of party) they then came to Samson and expounded it, saying, "what is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" Samson knew that his wife had discovered his secret, but he generously paid the wager, though certainly might justly have disputed it, as the Riddle had been told and not fairly unravelled; he contented himself merely with telling these generous men; that if they had not ploughed

with his heifer, meaning, if they had not used his wife in the matter, they would not have found out his Riddle.

This story may serve to convince us, that however innocent the custom of proposing Riddles may be, that of laying wagers is productive, in general, of strife and ill-will; and if this is not the consequence, it can excite no pleasing sensation in the generous mind; for if we win we must owe our good fortune to the ill success of our friend or neighbour, and no christian-like spirit can rejoice in that, and if we ourselves lose, it may either hurt our circumstances, or, if too inconsiderable, sour our tempers; and all things that tend in any way to do this, or in the slightest degree to excite the passion of avarice, ought to be carefully avoided by the sincere christian.

The avarice of the men of Timnah must have been very great, since, for the sake of saving each of them a sheep and a change of garments, the wager they were to pay if they did not expound the Riddle, they could commit the great sin of tempting a wife to betray her husband: but it pleased the Almighty to punish it, for we read, that "the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson, and he went down to Askalon, a city of the Philistines, and slew thirty of them." We are then told, that his anger being kindled, he went up to his father's house. During his absence from Timnah his father-in-law gave his wife in marriage to one who had been his friend; this so much incensed Samson on his return, that he set fire to the Philistines' fields of corn, and burnt both the flocks and the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.

This action, taken in a moral sense, cannot be

mainly be justified; for by these means Samson re-
 venged the injury done him by an individual on
 the whole people, who suffered seemingly for a fault
 which they did not commit: but when we look
 deeper into this matter, we behold Samson as an
 instrument in the hand of God, to punish a wicked
 and idolatrous people, who though they might not
 in this instance be guilty, had, by their sins, drawn
 on them the judgments of the Lord. We read af-
 ter this, that "Samson smote them with a great
 laughter, and that he went down and dwelt in the
 top of the rock Etam."

Then the Philistines went up and pitched in
 Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi, cities of the
 Israelites: and the men of Judah said, "Why are
 we come up against us? and they answered, to bind
 Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath
 done to us. Then the men of Judah went to the
 top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, knowest
 thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what
 hast thou done unto us? And he said unto them,
 they did unto me so have I done unto them. And
 the men of Judah said unto him, we are come down
 to bind thee, and to deliver thee into the hand of the
 Philistines. And Samson said, swear that ye will not
 fall on me yourselves. And the men of Judah
 sware unto him saying, No; but we will bind thee
 with flax, and deliver thee into their hand, but surely
 we will not kill thee; and they bound him with
 new cords, and brought him up from the
 rock. And when he came from Lehi the Philistines
 shouted against him; and the Spirit of the Lord
 came mightily upon him, and the cords that were
 on his hands became as flax that was burnt with
 fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

and he found the new jaw bone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith."

This slaughter of the Philistines, and the weapon wherewith it was effected, are both calculated to raise our wonder to the highest pitch, that one man should be more than a match for a thousand, with such an instrument as a jaw bone is beyond our finite conceptions, and we can only in awful wonder, acknowledge it to be the work of a Supreme Being, before whom the most numerous armies are but as dust which the wind scattereth. "*The Spirit of the Lord*," says the text, "*came mightily upon Samson*," preparing us for the great miracle which is immediately recorded. Samson, celebrating his victory, composed a short song, "With the jaw bone of an ass heaps upon heaps have I slain, a thousand men." He also gave the name of Ramah-Lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone, to the place.

Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years. We are then informed that he went to Gaza, a city of the Philistines; but it is difficult to conceive what he could have to do in a city of unbelievers: some think he went thither to observe what posture they were in, that he might take some advantage against them; but if he forgot his business, neglected that, and so fell into a snare; for his eye was caught by one in the attire of a Harlot, and of subtle heart, who seduced him into her house to pass the night with her. The Philistines, upon hearing that their enemy was come (perhaps by the information of the treacherous harlot) shut the gates of their city, thinking they now had him safe, and resolving

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ratify their revenge on him, but Samson rose at midnight, roused perhaps by a dream, or by the checks of his own conscience; and well indeed might his conscience rouse him; was this a bed for a Nazarite, by which is meant a man separated, set apart for the service of God, to rest in? He seems sensible of this, for he hastens immediately to the gates of the city, and finding them locked and barred, without staying to force them open, by his strength plucks up the posts, and takes them with the gates, bars and all on his shoulders, and carries them to the top of a hill, in contempt of the vain endeavours of his enemies to secure him. One would naturally suppose that Samson having once so narrowly escaped the snare laid for him, would have been more cautious in future; but it was far otherwise. Perhaps Solomon, Proverbs chap. vii. ver. 26, may refer to this circumstance. His caution against the seductions of a lascivious woman; after giving a striking description of her allurements he adds, "Hearken unto me now, therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her, says, go not astray in her paths: for she has cast down many wounded; yea, many *strong* men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death." Samson was again weak enough to be ensnared by the blandishments of a wicked woman: we read that "It came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah." The Philistines, as may be observed throughout the whole of this history, were very anxious to get Samson in their power; but this was difficult on account of his amazing strength, a

strength which so far surpassed all human power that we cannot wonder if they, ignorant as they were of the true God, and of the wonders he performs by those whom he chuses as his instruments we cannot wonder, I say, if, according to the superstitious ideas, they imagined that Samson carried about him a *Spell*, or *Charm*, from which he derived this wonderful power, and which if they could take from him, would render him more manageable. This seems to have been their opinion for we read, "The Lords of the Philistines came up to Delilah and said unto her, entice him (meaning Samson) and see wherein his great strength lieth and by what means we may prevail against him, afflict him, and we will give thee every one of eleven hundred pieces of silver."

Delilah was easily prevailed on by this bribe to do as they desired, and immediately began to practise her arts upon Samson; she entreated him to tell her wherein his wonderful *strength* lay, and whether it was really impossible he should be bound representing it no doubt as merely a matter of his own curiosity.

Samson, to rid himself of her importunities, though probably thinking it no more than the inquisitiveness of a talkative woman, put her off by saying, "that if he were bound with seven green withs he should become weak as another man." The treacherous Delilah told this to the Lords of the Philistines, thinking herself, no doubt, sure of the price of her iniquity, and they brought her seven green withs with which she bound Samson, probably when he was asleep. The Lords of the Philistines had, at the mean time, concealed men in the chamber ready to seize upon him when he should, as he had said,

become weak as another man; but when they came
 to seize him, he broke the withs with the same
 ease he had formerly done the cords that bound him.
 When the men of Judah delivered him to the Phi-
 listines. Delilah's importunities still continuing,
 Samson again put her off by saying, "that if he
 were bound with *new cords*, his strength would de-
 part from him." Delilah failed not to try this ex-
 periment, but when she warned him of the approach
 of the Philistines, who were lying in wait in the
 chamber, he broke the cords from off his arms like
 a thread. Again she was importunate, and again
 he deceived her by feigning, that if she *wove seven*
locks of his hair he should be her prisoner; and she
 gave him another proof of her treachery, for she
 not only wove the locks, but fastened him to the
 beam, but Samson waking out of his sleep, carried
 away both the pin and the beam.
 In all this it is difficult to say which was greatest;
 the folly and stupidity of Samson, or the impu-
 nence of Delilah; what could be more shameless
 and wicked than her restless importunity to disco-
 ver a secret which she knew would at least endan-
 ger the life of the man she lived with, especially
 when she had been so repeatedly detected in endea-
 vouring to turn his confidence to his destruction;
 but when once avarice takes possession of the heart,
 she sacrifices religion, justice, reputation, all to its
 gratification, and become fit only for those gloomy
 modes inhabited by spirits of darkness. Nor was
 the folly of Samson less than Delilah's wickedness;
 say no worse, what could be more weak than
 continuing a parly with one whom he must
 plainly see was aiming to destroy him, or at least
 to do him a mischief! when he so often found men

lying in wait in his chamber, is it not astonishing that he did not quit the house for ever? It is scarcely possible to imagine a man so besotted and void of all consideration; had we not been told by Solomon, that "Lust is one of the things that taketh away the heart, or understanding."

But to return to Samson; "Delilah said him, how canst thou say I love thee, when thine heart is not with me; thou hast mocked me three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth." Again we are astonished at his assurance, after having betrayed him three times to hope to prevail the fourth; but still more are we astonished to find that Samson, besotted with his importunity and blinded by his passion, at length laid his heart open to her, "for he said unto her there hath not come a razor upon my head; for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother's womb; if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me and I shall become weak, and shall be like any other man."

Now a Nazarite was, as I have observed before, a person, who took a vow to separate himself from the service of God. We find in the 6th chap. Numbers, many laws appertaining to those who took upon themselves the vow of the Nazarite; among others the following, "all the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head, until the days be fulfilled in which he separateth himself unto the Lord; he shall be holy; and shall let the locks of the head of his head grow." Samson's consecration to God, therefore, was his strength, and the pledge of it was, that *no razor should come on his head*, though he said, if I be shaven I shall violate my vow

Nazarite, and the Lord will withdraw my strength. This bodily strength depending so much on his hair, teaches us to magnify divine institutions, for Samson's hair could naturally have no influence on his strength; but the preserving it was joined by God; whose grace we can expect only by the use of such means as he had appointed.

As soon as Delilah saw that Samson had discovered to her the truth, she sent for the Philistines, desiring them to come this once, for that now Samson had discovered to her his whole heart; they came immediately, with the reward of unrighteousness in their hands. If any thing can add to the guilt of Delilah it is the treacherous method she took to accomplish her purpose, for we find she made Samson sleep on her knees, laid his head in her lap, and when asleep had a man ready to cut off his locks, which was done so silently and quickly, as not to awake him, though it plainly afflicted him in his sleep; his spirits we may suppose sunk upon it. Though he could not but miss his hair when he awoke, yet when Delilah said, "the Philistines be upon thee Samson," he replied, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself," thinking, perhaps, after sleep, the more to rouse himself to make his part good against the Philistines; poor Samson we may suppose found some change in himself, but wist not, that is, knew not, that the Lord was departed from him. Thus many provoke God to depart from them and are not sensible of their loss, their spiritual graces languish and grow weak, but they impute it not to the true cause. Samson having thrown himself out of the protection of God, the Philistines found no difficulty in seizing him; his defence was gone; they cruelly

put out his eyes, bound him in fetters, and carried him to Gaza, where he was set to grind in the prison house.

It is worthy observation, that Samson's eyes which were the inlets of his sin, were the beginning of his punishment, he saw the harlot of Gaza, and became fascinated with her charms; perhaps, by indulging himself in that sin he became less scrupulous in committing others. The best preservative is to turn away the eyes from vanity. The Philistines made him grind in the prison, a place perhaps similar to our Bridewell, for their profit, their pleasure, or for his punishment, or, perhaps for all these. Poor Samson how art thou fallen! how is the glory and defence of Israel become the drudge and triumph of the uncircumcised Philistines, we next read that the Lords of the Philistines gathered themselves together, to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their god, and to rejoice: for they said, "our god hath delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hand."

Before this we are told that Samson's hair began to grow; and there is no doubt from the sequel that he truly repented of the sin he had committed and humbled himself before the God he had offended. But how impiously did the Philistines affront the God of Israel! They offered sacrifice to Dagon their pretended deity, and to him ascribe their success; having committed this abomination and drunk of the sacrifices, according to the custom of idolaters, they rose up to divert themselves "and they said, call for Samson that he may make us sport, and they called Samson out of the prison house and he made them sport, and they set him between the pillars." They, no doubt, made them

ves merry at his expence, made him the fool of
 the play, and laughed to see how the poor blind
 man stumbled and blundered; but how justly did
 the God of Israel bring sudden destruction on them,
 and by the hands of him whom they despised, and
 whom they no doubt thought they had rendered
 perfectly harmless! Thousands of them were got
 together to see this comedy, but it proved in the
 end to them a dreadful tragedy; for Samson said
 to the lad that held him by the hand, "Suffer
 me that I may feel the pillars whereon the house
 standeth, that I may lean upon them." This too,
 as, perhaps, a matter of sport; what would this
 for Jew be at? was perhaps spitefully echoed.
 But Samson having by an earnest prayer to God re-
 gained the strength he had lost by sin, bears for-
 ward with all his might, with his arms about the
 pillars of the house, and has only time to add these
 words, "let me die with the Philistines." The
 house falls upon the lords, and upon all the people
 therein; so, adds the Scripture, "the dead which
 he slew at his death was more than they which he
 slew in his life."

Such was the end of Samson, whose life affords
 an instance, among numbers, how little the best or
 wisest of us can do when left to ourselves, that is,
 when by our sins we oblige the Almighty to with-
 draw from us his protection and grace; for such is
 the goodness and mercy, that nothing but our own
 obdurate hearts and vile passions can deprive us of
 his blessing, "he is always more ready to hear than
 to pray," and we are told, that "there is joy in
 heaven over one sinner that repenteth." With such
 encouragement, what must be our infatuation if we
 fully persevere in sin! The first approaches to

is always dangerous, if not fatal; had turned his eyes from the bewitching all of Delilah, though the effort had perhaps some pain, he had escaped all the miseries lowed. Let us be more wise, and humbly our hearts to the God of all mercies, pray he will, through his blessed Son, grant us to resist temptations and to live according to will.

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